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NOTES ON GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Mammalia, Rodentia, Sigmodontinae, *Loxodontomys micropus*: New locality records.

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Loxodontomys micropus (Waterhouse, 1837) is a nocturnal, relative big sigmodontine rodent (mean weight of adult specimens = 63 g) that inhabits humid or meadow habitats with dense vegetation (Pearson 1995). This species is distributed along the southern Andean and piedmont region of Chile and Argentina from about 36° S to the Estrecho de Magallanes (Hershkovitz 1962; Jayat et al. 2006). Not so far ago Pearson (1995) mentioned that *L. micropus* is found "…in forests, marshes, or mesic brushy habitats; not in desert habitats but found as much as 50 km out into the steppe if there is sufficient vegetation cover". However, the known distribution of this species was considerably extended to the east of the Andean forest with the recent finding of several isolated populations in the steppes of the provinces of Chubut and Río Negro (Teta et al. 2002; Pardiñas et al. 2003). The aim of this contribution is to present new locality records for *L. micropus* in Chubut province and discuss briefly its distribution in Central Patagonia.

The new records result from the study of pellets of the Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*; Aves, Tytonidae) and Magellanic Horned Owl (*Bubo magellanicus*; Aves, Strigidae) from different localities of the province of Chubut. Owl pellets samples were collected mostly during 2004-2006. Osteological remains were picked apart and identified by comparison with reference material housed at the *Colección de Egagrópilas y Afines "Elio Massoia"* of *Centro Nacional Patagónico*, Puerto Madryn, Argentina. The examined specimens are preserved in this collection, acronym CNP-E. Osteological and dental remains of *L. micropus* (Figure 1) are recognized by the following combination of characteristics: nasals broader than the interorbital constriction; supraorbital ridges and knobs absent; upper incisors typically ungrooved with tripartite dentine fissure; upper molar rows divergent backwards; upper first molar with indistinct parastyle/anteroflexus; anterolabial cingulum distinct; upper first molar with two labial roots; upper third molar with two roots (Steppan 1995).

New recording localities (arranged from west to east) are as follows (Figure 2):

1: Cholila (42°31' S, 71°27' W; CNP-E 135).
2: El Blanco (42°30' S, 71°27' W; CNP-E 138-9; 161; 173; and 176).
3: El Coihue (42°10' S, 71°18' W; CNP-E 149).
4: Buenos Aires Chico (42°04'02" S, 71°12'35" W; CNP-E 178).
5: 9 km S El Maitén on route 12 (42°08'07" S, 71°09'38" W; CNP-E 174 and 177).
6: Ranquilhuao (42°15'04" S, 70°55'49" W; CNP-E 163-4; 167; and 173).
7: Fofo Cahuel (42°20'27" S, 70°28'05" W; CNP-E 127).
8: 10 km W Piedra Parada on route 12 (42°38'14" S, 70°13'25" W; CNP-E 129).
9: Tres cuevas, 4 km W Piedra Parada on route 12 (42°38'50" S, 70°09'10" W; CNP-E 33).
10: Cañadón de la Buitrera (42°38'58" S, 70°06'12" W; CNP-E 8; 156).
11: Estancia Cretón (42°42'14" S, 70°02'31" W; CNP-E 39).
12: 20 km SE Paso del Sapo on route 12 (42°50'21" S, 69°32'01" W; CNP-E 115).
13: 10 km NW conjunction route 40 and route 12 (43°34'26" S, 69°02'49" W; CNP-E 34).
14: 36 km W Los Altares on route 25 (43°51'44" S, 68°49'36" W; CNP-E 51).
15: 4 km S Tres Banderas on route 11 (42°48'31" S, 68°00'56" W; CNP-E 75).

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Figure 1. Anterior portion of skull (from left to right: dorsal, ventral, and lateral views) and left mandible in lateral view of *Loxodontomys micropus* obtained from Barn Owl pellets from the province of Chubut, Argentina (CNP-E 174). Scale = 10 mm.

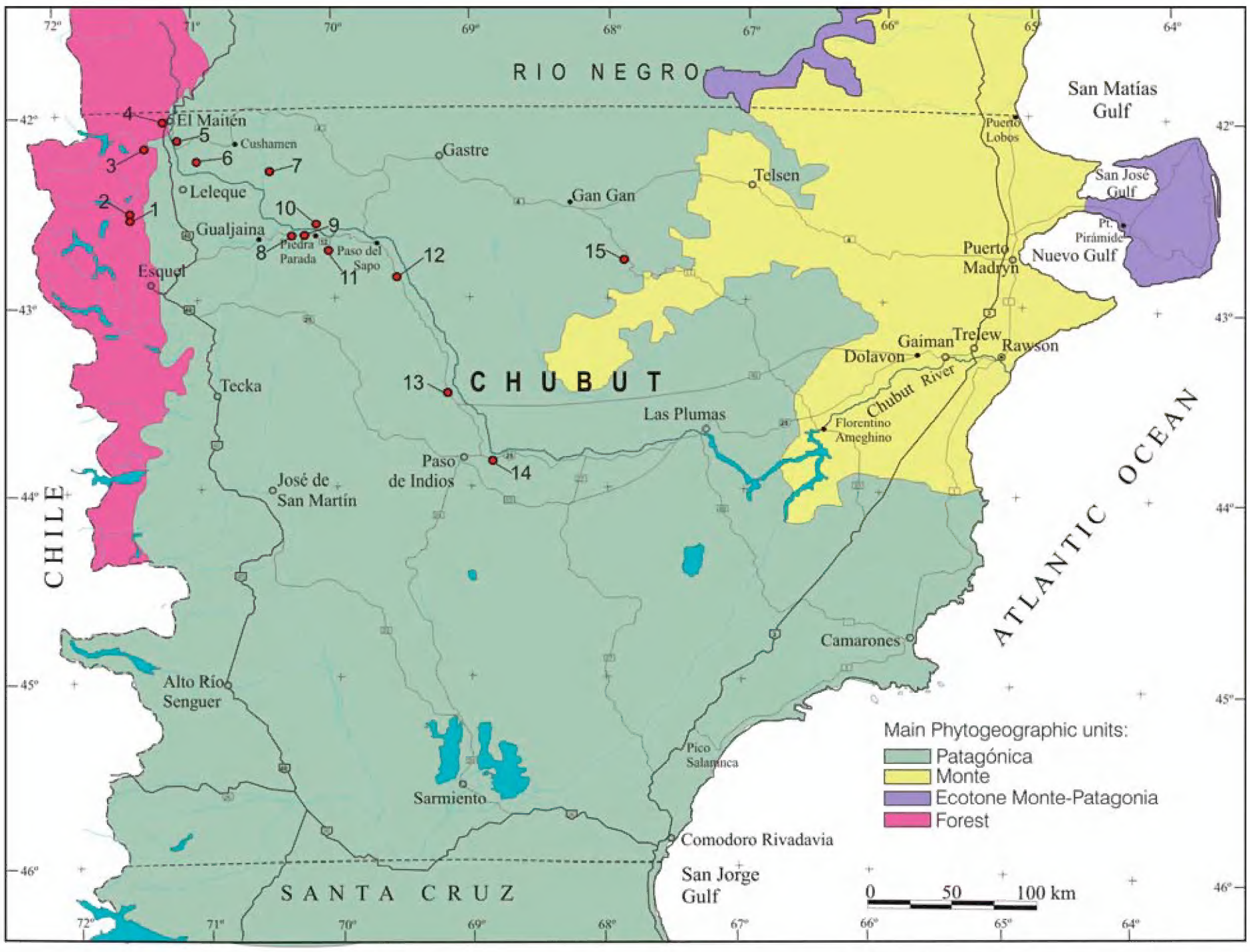

Figure 2. New locality records for *Loxodontomys micropus* in the province of Chubut, Argentina.

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Owl pellets samples collected in forest (see Udrizar Sauthier et al. 2005) and forest-steppe ecotone areas, demonstrating that *L. micropus* represents an important item in the diet of owls, reflecting its relatively high abundance on these habitats (recording localities 1 to 6; Figure 2). In the remaining samples (recording localities 7 to 15; Figure 2), which are referable to the *Patagónica* phytogeographic province, its frequency is low, possible reflecting its low abundance in relationship with other steppe species (e.g. *Eligmodontia* sp., *Reithrodon auritus*). This situation could be related with the scarce representation of suitable habitats, restricting the distribution of *L. micropus* to small patches of lush grasses (Monjeau 1989). It is important to remark the influence of ovine livestock over these extremely fragile habitats, which may cause the extirpation of isolated populations of *L. micropus* in many sectors of Extra-Andean Patagonia. The records mentioned in this contribution are new localities for *L. micropus*. Nevertheless, the most oriental ones should not be considered as a range extension to the east (cf. Hershkovitz 1962); the recording localities 12, 13, 14, and 15 must be considered as part of isolated populations, perhaps as relicts of a more extensive past distribution (Teta et al. 2002).

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